

In the Valley of the Kings, Lara has discovered the lost tomb of Ankhesenamun, Tutankhamun's widow. She has done so without the help of Egyptologist Alvin Blackmore, whose mysterious death in London left her in the lurch. Standing before the queen's sarcophagus she discovers another tombraider pointing a gun at the back of her head. This is the conduding episode of ERICA WAGNER's tale.

LARA FROZE. SHE could feel the gun trained on her; it was like being stared at, but worse. She'd have no chance to reach for her weapon. She could only stand and watch as the hulking figure of Alvin Blackmore emerged from the darkness behind to stand facing her over the sarcophagus of Tutankhamun's queen.

"Well done, Lara," he said. "Even if I did have to help you along those last few yards to the tomb. Still, I couldn't bear to deprive you of the pleasure of discovery. And really, these days, I'm far too old for all that digging."

'I guess you didn't have a heart attack," Lara said. "Healthy as a horse, my dear, healthy as a horse!" He laughed - it echoed, caroming around the tight stone walls of the chamber - and slapped a meaty hand on his broad chest. "Never been fitter. And all the better for seeing you - for the last time."

"It won't work, Blackmore," she said.

"What won't work? Of course it will. You stole Carter's little notebook, of that I'm certain: and you wouldn't have taken it if anyone had been aware of its existence. So now there are two of us who know about it - Haggarty I was willing to take a risk with because I figured you'd do away with him, and I'm grateful to you for not letting me down. But really, once I'd seen what was at stake, I couldn't let you go running around raising a ruckus about it."

"So why not kill me straight away? Why bring me all the way out here, let me find the tomb?"

"Like I said, I wanted you to have some fun before you went, Lara. Mean to do otherwise, don't you think? But I wasn't about to murder the well-connected Lara Croft in cold blood in London. A most unlikely death for you, that would be. But if Lara Croft died in a rockfall while on the trail of one of Egypt's last hidden tombs - why, that would make perfect sense. No one would dream of asking any awkward

"I suppose not," Lara admitted.

"It's a pity, really. I like you. I admire you. You're pretty sharp, if a little naive. But then I suppose you couldn't resist Ankhesenamun's promises either. The kind of thing to make a person throw caution to the winds, don't you think?"

"Looks like it," Lara said. "Then you believe it - the promise of eternal life?"

"Well," Blackmore said. "There's no harm in trying, is there? And anyway - even if it's all crap, you saw the treasures that were outside. I've never been a subscriber to the dour rule over the dead; his sister-wife Isis, her fierce face streaked philosophy that money and fame can't buy you happiness. I've always found - at least where the former is concerned quite the opposite to be true."

"Your sister's got your number, you know. She said nothing was ever enough for you."

"Cornelia? You spoke to Cornelia? Dear Cornelia. How was she? I would say - you must give her my regards, but it's too late for that now." Blackmore grinned, and keeping his gun trained on Lara, reached out for the jewel set in the sarcophagus. His voice trembling with excitement, he recited from the last page of the notebook that had been in his possession. "Whomsoever shall claim the jewel set in the widow's breast shall find that Re never sets on him, nor on his generation," he intoned. "Life eternal shall be his, just as the Nile rises and ebbs eternally in its mighty bank." And he reached out, curled his fingers around the emerald and lifted t from its place.

Instantly it burned with a white light; so bright that Lara could see the bones in Blackmore's hand. His face blazed with it, lit and shadowed by the unearthly light.

Lara began to shake, but held her ground, and when she spoke her voice was almost as firm as she'd have liked it to be. "You never saw the last page, did you, Blackmore?"

"What?" His eyes were on fire; he seemed filled with something inhuman and terrible. "Whomsoever shall claim the jewel set in the widow's

breast shall find that Re never sets on him, nor on his generation. Life eternal shall be his, just as the Nile rises and eiths eternally in its mighty banks. For he who is worthy, this reward will come; for he whose soul falls heavy in the scale, the retribution of the gods will surely follow."

Later, when Lara would try to explain what happened next, she would find her usual facility with words deserting her. How to describe it - she'd written it down, over and over, and then crumpled each effort and thrown it in the bin. The pictures had come off the walls. They had peeled themselves away and rushed at them - not as she'd imagined the falling statue of Anubis moving but reaching out with stretched arms and blazing black eyes, their flat shapes made flesh. Horus, hawk-headed, one-eyed, just and terrible; Osiris, the crowns of Upper and Lower Egypt on his brow, bound as a god to with the grief of her loss. And behind them all a figure so

awful that Lara felt the air punched out of her lungs to look at it. Man or beast, impossible to tell - the head of some animal out of a nightmare, great teeth, fiery eyes, slime and foul breath: the stench of the dead. It was this figure that seemed to lead the charge as the creatures turned on Blackmore and tore him into a dozen pieces. The stink of burning human flesh filled the dry air of the tomb.

Lara would have trouble making up her mind whether to include the next detail in her story - she fainted. What she remembered next were shadows turned to spiderweb, to a nest that bound her and held her and bore her out of the tomb, leaving her stretched out on the sand in the desert air. When she opened her eyes she saw - or did she dream it? - the beast-head of Set looming over her with a warning before fading into mist. Death comes on wings to he who enters the tomb of a pharaoh.

The hot desert sand cradled her head. Lara sat up. Her rib ached worse than ever, but she could stand. In the distance she saw the film of smog that showed her where the city lay; she turned towards it and began to walk. Well, she'd certainly have something to tell Jeremy when she met him at the place his clues had led her to. She wondered if he'd ever outsmart her... but perhaps that wasn't the point. She quickened her pace through the desert heat. She really was looking forward to seeing him.

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THE TIMES LEVEL OF LARA CROFT

Anyone connected to the internet can download a special Times version of Tomb Raider, starring Lara Croft, and our own editor, Peter Stothard. The game is available to download from The Times Lara microsite: www.the-times.co.uk/lara/

For those of you who have never downloaded a whole game before:

You first need to check if your machine is powerful enough to contain Lara. Core Design, the makers of the Tomb Raider games, including The Times version, recommend a minimum of a Pentium processor running at 233MHz, 16Mb of memory, all running Windows 95/98. An internet connection is also required to download the game.

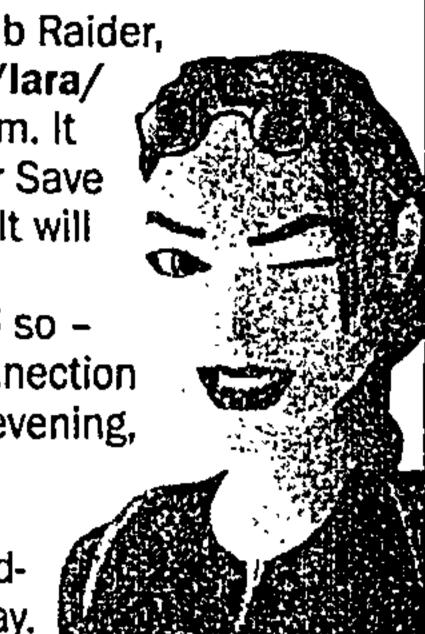
You will also need to be running DirectX6.1 or better. To find which version of DirectX you have, double-click on the My Computer icon, then click on C:, Program Files, DirectX, Setup, and finally DXDiag.

This program will then show which version of DirectX you have installed. If it is less than DirectX6.1 you need to upgrade by going to http://windowsupdate.microsoft.com in your web browser, and following the instructions on the screen.

When ready to download The Times Tomb Raider, point your browser at www.the-times.co.uk/lara/ and click on the link to download the program. It will ask whether you wish to Open the File or Save To Disk. Select Open The File, and click OK. It will then start to download.

The whole game is around 10Mb big and so depending on the speed of your internet connection - will take around 1-2 hours. Do this in the evening, or at the weekend, and the phone call

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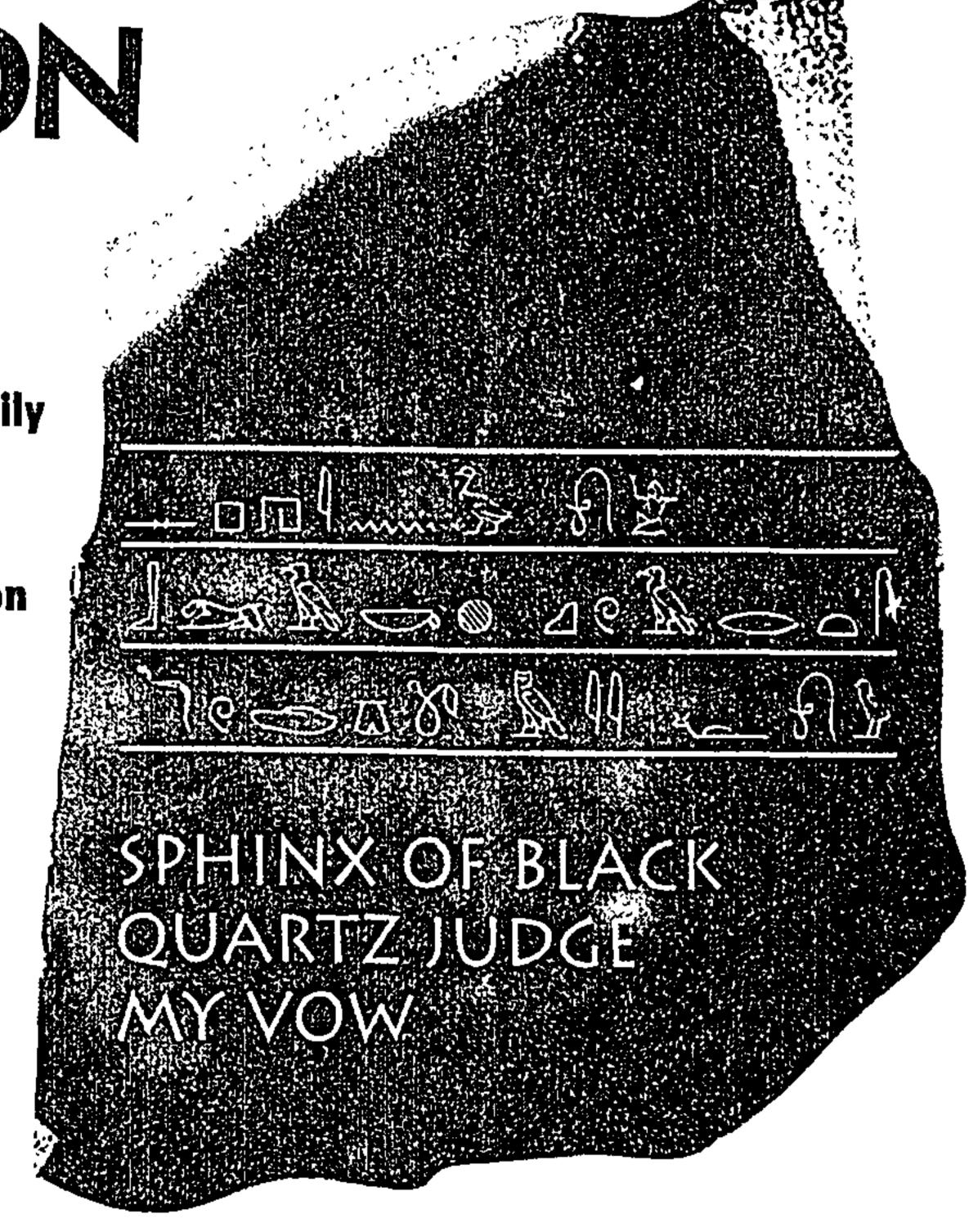
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Welcome to the last of Lara's seven riddles. Over the past month we have been offering fantastic prizes from The Times, Eidos and Microsoft. However this last riddle gives you the chance to win one of three Goldenjoy Holidays family trips to Egypt. The answers to the previous six puzzles will help you in finding the right answer to this one and thus give you a chance to go tomb raiding. Best of luck and soon you may find yourself in the company of Tutankhamun!

USING THE TIMES ROSETTA STONE (RIGHT) AS A KEY, TRANSLATE AND RE-ARRANGE THE PIECES OF THE SMASHED TABLET BELOW TO FIT THE BLANK GRID (WE HAVE ALREADY INSERTED FOUR BLOCKS TO GET YOU STARTED). EACH PIECE CONTAINS THREE ELEMENTS -HIEROGLYPHS OR SPACES. SOLVE THE RIDDLE, WHEN YOU HAVE THE ANSWER, RING THE COMPETITION HOT-LINE, LEAVING THE ANSWER, YOUR NAME, ADDRESS AND DAYTIME TELEPHONE NUMBER. ENTRIES MAY ALSO BE MADE VIA OUR WEBSITE. CLUES MAY BE FOUND ON OUR WEBSITE AND AT

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